

WINNING A COUSIN.

Or, A SECRET OF FORTUNE TELLING.

By A. W. NONEY.

CHAPTER I.

“There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

“Oh, Isabel, do look at this beautiful bouquet!” exclaimed a gay young lady, running into the parlor where her cousin was seated— “*such* a sweet little one! I wish I knew who sent it to me!”

“Some of your admirers, very likely,” returned the more staid Isabel, “and you get *all* the pretty presents,” she continued, affecting to pout at the idea. But the other was too much engrossed with her bouquet to notice this playful jealousy.

“This rose is splendid!” said she, turning up the petals with her taper white fingers, and inhaling its delicious fragrance—“isn’t it perfectly lovely, coz? And how tastefully all are arranged! Oh, I *do wish* I knew who sent it to me!”

Had Sarah Williams chanced to notice the embarrassed air of Isabel's brother, who was sitting on the sofa at the moment, to appearance particularly engaged in studying the variegated figures of a Saxony carpet, she might have conjectured with her sex's intuitive shrewdness sufficient for her own satisfaction on the subject, without having occasion to push the enquiry farther. But in the haste to show Isabel her flowers, she did not observe that there was any other person in the room, and therefore continued in her extravagant admiration and expressions of wonder, with all the buoyant gaiety of a light and careless heart, and partly in the roguish design of teasing her amiable cousin with the tantalizing sight

“Isn’t it *beautiful*?” she continued, “smell of it, dear, it is so fragrant!”

“I would not be in such an ecstasy with it, Saade,” said Isabel, gravely pushing the bouquet to one side. “People will imagine you never had the present of a pretty bunch of flowers before.”

“Nor have I ever received such a lovely one, I am sure,” she returned gaily—
“why how curiously it is made up! It must be a love-letter, certainly! Now *if I only*
knew the language of flowers! How provoking! Isn’t it, coz?”

“Yes. But perhaps Frederick will read it to you,” replied Isabel, “he understands
their language.”

“Oh, do, cousin Frederick, if you please,” she exclaimed, turning suddenly
around, causing him to start up and stammer—“yes—no—I don’t understand—
that is...”

“Oh, don’t be frightened, sir,”-said she, bursting into a laugh at his confusion, “it
won’t bite you! Did you never hear of a young lady’s receiving a flowery love
letter before?”

“Yes, certainly I have,” he answered, recovering his faculties, “I only meant to
say that I do know the meaning of some flowers; but I would not presume to
read a young lady’s correspondence.”

“Suppose she cannot read it herself, as I have heard of being the case with
even vulgar foolscap blotted with ink, and she wishes you to read it to her; you
would not be so ungallant as to refuse?”

“By no means; especially when my pretty cousin asks me,” said he, smiling as a
slight blush rose on her cheek at the last sentence.

“Well, then, Mr. Flatterer, what does this one say?” she asked with affected
seriousness, turning out the leaves of a beautiful little tulip.

“I love you...”

“What do you say, sir?”

“It intimates a declaration of love, Saade,” interposed Isabel, knowing that her
brother meant more than his manner indicated.

“Oh, I knew that before,” said she, with a haughty toss of her head.

“Nay, then, Miss Pertness, you do not need my assistance,” returned Frederick,
a little fearful he might unwisely betray himself before the proper period for a
certain disclosure he had to make.

“But the tulip is the only one that I know the meaning of, I assure you, and I had forgotten even that. So you will please to proceed; *Que signifie les autres?* as we say in New Orleans.”

“Taken as a whole, cousin, the bouquet declares a secret, yet undying passion for you,” said the interpreter, bending his dark eyes upon her own with a thrilling expression, which caused her to blush deeply, although she affected not to notice him.

“But flowers are emblematical of a passion which will soon decay, notwithstanding. Don’t you think so?”

“They are like the heart’s deep and best feelings, which, if they are not cherished must wither,” answered Frederick, with a suppressed sigh.

“You don’t say so! how melancholy, to be sure!” returned Sarah jeeringly. “But if the gentleman’s love is as sweet as his message is fragrant, he must be a *dear* little fellow.”

“And isn’t love ever sweet? Remember how the poets describe the passion— ‘redolent with bliss’ — perfumed with sighs’ — ‘honey-dew kisses’ —”

“That’s quite sufficient, sir; sweet enough in all conscience!”

“Sweets to the sweet, you know, cousin Saade.”

“Hush, you simpleton! Here, you shall have a rose to pay for your gallantry. But, do you remember,” continued she, turning again to Isabel, “do you remember the lady we are to call upon tomorrow afternoon?”

“No; who do you mean?” asked Isabel.

“Why old”—here her voice sunk to a whisper, not so low, however, but that Frederick’s acute ear detected sounds similar to “Old Margaret, the fortune teller,” and he readily divined the nature of their intended visit.

“You don’t call her a lady?” returned Isabel, smiling.

“Hush!” said she in a whisper, “I would not have your brother know we are going for the world.”

Frederick, however, left the room as if to give them opportunity to complete arrangements for the call on "Old Margaret," a withered hag who had acquired some notoriety among the young ladies of the city for her shrewd conjectures and predictions, with regard to the all-important object with them, a happy marriage.

Sarah Williams was a beautiful girl! Her's was the dark featured loveliness of the sunny south, of which clime she was a native. Her eyes were full, lustrous orbs of a midnight blackness, which, when she was animated, flashed with an expression that thrilled to the heart. Her hair was of the like color, and usually bound up in luxuriant folds at the back of her head, or flowing down her neck in long wavy tresses, and her brow was as bright and sunny as her own native sky. Her teeth were of a pearly whiteness, and her cheeks, though wearing the "shadowed livery of the burning sun," were of such a transparent hue as to reveal the bright blood gleaming through, and tinging their darkness with a roseate light, as the setting sun gilds the shadows of early eve. Her figure was petite, but graceful—and its outlines were full and symmetrically rounded. Her step was light and free as the wild gazelle's, and her laugh broke upon the ear like her voice, with a clear, ringing tone, melodious as the swell of an organ. She was an orphan; her parents both dying of a prevailing epidemic, while she was in her twelfth year of her age, leaving her almost penniless. By this calamity her deceased mother's brother became her guardian, and she left the south to become a resident of his family in this city. Here her loveliness and sweet disposition won her many friends, and her relatives almost idolized her, while she in return loved them, and strove in every manner to manifest her grateful feelings for their many kindnesses. From their unrestrained intimacy she had unconsciously won the heart of her cousin Frederick to a deeper feeling than that warranted by their tie of relationship, which, although she herself remained in ignorance of it, was observed with pleasure by her doating relatives, and they were delighted at the idea of her becoming, at some future day, their daughter and sister as well as cousin and niece.

CHAPTER II.

About four o'clock on the succeeding day, two young ladies might have been seen walking with hesitating steps down one of the narrow lanes of Kensington, as if unused to the location, and hardly confident of being in the proper path they wished to pursue. They were dressed in elegant and fashionable style, and their air and manner plainly bespoke them residents of some more notable street than the one they were at the time traversing. Their figures were erect

and graceful, strongly contrasting with the thick waists and round shoulders of the coarse and vulgar-looking females who jostled rudely past them, with an occasional expression of ridicule at the fragile forms and sylph-like motions of the two strangers. They kept their features closely veiled, however, and glided on, too timid to bestow even a glance in return, and passing down the entire length of the street, turned into a still more narrow court or alley, where, with a few steps, they stood in front of a low, dark, mysterious looking frame house, which, to say the least of it, bore evident marks of Time's decaying fingers over the whole extent of its exterior.

Here they paused, and whispered together for a few moments, and from their gestures and looks of mistrustful curiosity at the low entrance to the humble dwelling, each seemed anxious that the other should have the honor of pioneering the way within; but, however, through the modest diffidence usually attending real merit, or from some other more cogent reason, both timidly persisted in declining the acceptance of such distinguished priority. At length they ended the generous contest by both advancing at the same time and together—one knocking noiselessly with her fingers at the panel, while the other clung tremblingly to her left arm as if for support and protection. They now listened for some minutes in breathless anxiety; but hearing no sign of life inside, she was constrained to knock again—and again, thrice repeated, each time the weight of her blows slightly increasing as she acquired from the delay a little fresh confidence, until they sounded three distinct lady-like taps, when the noise of shuffling feet was heard, and the door was slowly opened by a short, withered old yellow woman, who, with a scowl on her features, in a gruff toned voice inquired their pleasure.

“We wish to speak with the woman who foretells fortunes,” was their timid answer.

“Then please to step in—I am her,” said the old hag relaxing the frown upon her face, as far as the dignity of her profession would admit.

The young ladies,—whom the reader has ere this surmised to be our two cousins,—advanced and seated themselves upon a sort of wooden bench, which served for the accommodation of visitors in lieu of a sofa, when she entered an adjoining room, and gave them ample time to wonder what she could be about, or what had become of her. At length she returned again and briefly asked which of the young ladies would like first to learn her future destiny; adding “I never tells anybody's fortin' when there's anybody else in the room besides him who tells me.”

This speech served to increase their apprehensions, and the same contest as before arose between them, when the woman rather impatiently interrupted it.

“Never you be afeard, young ladies, he will not let you see him, and he never hurts anybody. You’ll only hear us talking; so cum along one of ye!”

“Go, Isabel,” whispered Sarah, “you go first and then I will go.”

“No, my dear cousin,” returned the other, “I think you ought to go first, for you wish to hear your fortune more than I do mine.”

“But then I expected she would tell us both together,” said Sarah, when the old woman manifested her increasing impatience by exclaiming, “don’t be afeard, Miss, nobody’ll hurt ye!”

“Go, coz!” said Isabel again; “you coaxed me to come up here, and now I think you ought, certainly, to have yours told first; besides I don’t care for my part whether I have mine told at all, without you have a good one.”

Thus constrained, Sarah rose to go, when the sybil holding out her shrivelled hand, intimated that her fee was fifty cents, to be paid in advance, and then led the way into the other apartment.

The room into which they entered had been purposely darkened by some articles of wearing apparel hung over the only window in it, and on the table in the centre was placed a small iron kettle, out of which arose a pale blue smoke, filling the room with a strong sulphurous scent, and occasionally emitting a broad lurid flame, glaring fitfully upon the ceiling, and rendering the prevailing darkness doubly hideous. After going through a kind of incantation, the sybil approached Sarah, and requested that she would remove her veil.

“Now,” she continued, as it was reluctantly thrown aside, “would ye like to know what’s to cum, or what’s bin, Miss?”

“The future,” whispered Sarah, too frightened to speak aloud.

“Yes, that’s what all young ladies want to know; and I needn’t av axed the question. You want to find out when you ’ll git married, and who’s agoin’ to be your husband, I spose. Well, Miss Sarah Williams, I’ll tell ye all about it in a few minutes.”

Sarah could not speak to answer her question, for she was frightened and confounded that the old woman should know her name without even making an enquiry; but tremblingly watched her every motion, as she went to the iron dish, and then followed a confused muttering as of two voices, for the space of nearly five minutes.

At length the old woman returning, commenced her prophecy by saying—"you'll git married, Miss, before this year's out, and at your uncle's house, mind. I musn't tell your husband's name, but he is a tall young gentleman, with black hair, and dark eyes, high forrard, and very rich. He loves you dearly, and you love him more than you tell on; and you will live very happy together, cos he will make a very loving husband. You will have three children—two girls and one boy, and your husband will die first, and you..."

"Stop!—stop!—good woman!" cried Sarah, half frightened out of her wits at the old woman's words, and the solemn and unearthly tone in which she delivered them, "I have heard enough; I do not wish to hear anything farther. I do not desire to learn when I am to die, because it will make me unhappy. I will go now, if you please."

"Darter," she returned slowly and sternly, "you've begun to hear your fortin' and you must hear it all! you shouldn't have come if you were afeard. Your husband will die first, and as I said before, and you will also die a little while arter, cos you 'll take his death so much at heart—and all before you're forty years old. There, that's all," saying this she took her hand and led her back, nearly fainting, into the room from whence they came.

Isabel, who sat anxiously awaiting their re-appearance, seeing her cousin's pale features and agitated manner, refused to have her own fortune told, in spite of old Margaret's assurances that there was "nothing to be afeard of," and Sarah was nothing loath to leave the house as quickly as possible.

On their way home Isabel was all curiosity to know what the "old witch" told her cousin, and Sarah, with some reluctance, related in strict confidence, all that had been said.

"Why, it's Frederick—my brother!" she exclaimed with astonishment at the coincidence, and then burst into a loud laugh at her accuracy of description, and at the idea that he should be the one foretold by old Margaret. Though Isabel could not but believe that the old hag possessed the power of foretelling

occurrences, yet it appeared singular she should have described one so as to be recognized. Had it been an indistinct description of some dark and mysterious stranger, it would have been more in accordance with her ideas of fortune-telling.

With Sarah, however, the reality of all she had listened to was forcibly impressed upon her mind; every word sunk into her heart, carrying conviction along with it. She felt it impossible to doubt even the slightest portion of the information received, and she was fairly overcome with astonishment. "How," thought she, "could a total stranger have learned my name thus readily; except by supernatural means! How could she have known that a gentleman, answering the description of my cousin, was in love with me? And still more surprising, how came she to be aware of that secret, which has been scarcely breathed even to my own thought, much less to another! It is certainly strange—very strange!" She pondered over it long and intently; yet she could not wish the prediction false. The veil seemed now lifted from before her eyes, and the whole prospect of futurity lay within view, while all was fair—bright as her most ardent hopes could wish; she loved her noble and generous-hearted cousin; but till now had not cherished the remotest idea that they would ever be married, for her dependent situation upon the kindness of her friends forbade the thought, and she had for this reason ever treated him with more reserve than she really felt toward him, deeming it a duty to refrain from encouraging his evident affection for her.

CHAPTER III.

A few days after the visit to old Margaret, Sarah sat alone in her uncle's parlor, leaning her head upon her hand, and gazing listlessly from the window toward the sky. Her thoughts were wandering far away to her own native clime, and she sighed as the remembrance of the scenes of her early youth passed before her mind. She saw the home of her childhood, looking like a fairy palace amid the orange groves, beneath whose, fragrant shade she had strayed, and plucking bright blooming flowers in the unclouded gaiety of a glad heart that had known no sorrows, or felt no ills; and it seemed to her an elysium, from which she had been driven by the relentless hand of fate, to wander alone, as it were, unprotected and dependent over a cold and selfish world. From thence her thoughts reverted to her uncle's kindness—and her cousins' manifested affection for her, a penniless orphan, living upon the bounty of their father, while her heart overflowed with a deep and yearning sense of gratitude toward them all, and her eyes became suffused with tears. But suppressing these emotions, she strove to divert her thoughts to another subject, for she knew it would

deeply pain any of her friends if they should chance to find her weeping.

The prediction of her future marriage with Frederick Somers made a deep impression upon her mind, and had a contrary effect from what might have been expected upon her actions. She became suddenly distant and reserved in her manner toward him, for she feared that Isabel might imagine that she endeavored to assist in the fulfilment of the prophecy, and might not perhaps approve of it. But these thoughts wronged her amiable cousin, who was even then looking forward with delight in the anticipation of being endeared to her sweet Saade by nearer ties than those which bound them at present.

Frederick was pained by her change of manner, and sought his sister to learn the cause of it, if possible from her. Isabel unfolded to him the whole story of their late visit to the fortune-teller; but to her surprise he manifested little satisfaction at the circumstance, though she was well aware he was deeply in love, and did not desire a greater boon than the hand of his lovely cousin. She, however, attributed it to his ignorance of the sex, supposing, as was the case, that he disbelieved in the supernatural wisdom of old Margaret, and augured unfavorably for his suit, from Sarah's apparent disapproval of the fortune laid down for her. But she advised him, however, not to despair, for she felt assured he was not all indifferent to her cousin; and, perhaps, if he urged his passion in connexion with the prediction which she appeared to believe, he might not fail to win her. Encouraged by his sister's advice, he resolved to hazard his fate upon a single cast; and by chance entered the parlor while Sarah was thus alone, and interrupted her musings. Such a favorable opportunity was not to be lost, and he determined to improve it to the best advantage.

"Have you discovered the donor of that bouquet, yet, cousin?" he inquired, advancing with a smile.

She started at this question, but assuming an indifferent tone and manner, replied—

"Oh, no; I have not troubled myself at all about it. It was sent by some of my friends, I suppose, as a jest. I do not know what else it could mean."

This gave a dash to his spirits, for he fondly imagined, his beautiful offering had found unbounded favor in her sight, and he could scarcely repress a sigh that struggled for relief in his breast. But bearing up, he continued.

"I thought you were very much pleased with it, and eager to learn who sent it

you, as it appeared to be such a rare one.”

“I would like to know well enough; but I receive so many gifts of the kind, that I forget all about them in a short time.”

“And do you never think afterwards of the givers?” he inquired mournfully.

“Why should I care about them?” asked Sarah coldly, “they are nothing to me.”

He now began to fear more than ever that the thought of becoming his wife was displeasing to her; but he felt it was time to learn the truth, for his impatient spirit could not brook suspense.

“Would it displease you,” he commenced, hesitatingly, “to know that I took the liberty of sending you that bunch of flowers?”

“You, cousin Frederick!” she exclaimed, starting and blushing deeply, while her eyes sparkled with pleasure. He, however, stupidly attributed their flashing brilliancy to another cause, though he could not exactly understand what reason she had to blush. “Did you really?” she asked with evident interest, forgetting at the moment her self-command.

“I did, cousin, and in the hope that it might intimate to you, what I had not then the confidence to tell with words—that I love you. Hear me, dear Sarah,” he continued imploringly, “do not scorn me—for if you knew how deeply I love you, you would not treat me thus. You turn away—then I may not hope,” he said despairingly. As he thus spoke, the witch’s prophecy recurred to her mind, and the singularity of the circumstance, induced her, despite her responsive feelings, to smile.

Frederick started up angry and excited at her heartslessness, as he deemed such extraordinary levity of conduct, and said bitterly; “Can I believe my senses. Miss Williams! I little deemed my sweet and gentle cousin would ever treat me thus, even though she may not have the same feelings toward me, which I profess and bear toward her. But I am answered, and henceforth all the bright hopes of love and happiness which I have so long and fondly cherished, are thus carelessly crushed, even without their cold hearted object feeling how much I would have loved her, and how deep is the despair to which she has doomed my poor heart.”

“Pardon me, Frederick,” said she, recovering her seriousness at his words, “that

I was unable to command myself. I did not mean to offend, I assure you. And now, therefore, from this very unfortunate circumstance, I am induced to confess to you, what I still should have hesitated in saying, had I been able to have maintained a proper decorum, as you told me of your affection—that I am not as you imagine indifferent to it. Yet, you must not urge me farther.”

“And why not, dearest, will you not love me? Will you not marry me?”

“It may not be, Frederick, your parents and sister would disapprove of it, and deem me no more than a fortune-hunter.”

“Do not speak thus, dear Sarah,” he interrupted, “they as earnestly desire our union, as I do myself. Do not offer any such trivial objections; but say that you will become, my wife. ‘Oh! then I, and all of us shall be truly happy.’”

Sarah, would not, or could not reply, for she deemed it insincere and useless to offer farther opposition. Ere they parted, Frederick had imprinted the kiss of an affianced lover on her lips.

“I have often thought on the ridiculous figure you cut while popping the question to me,” said Mrs. Frederick Somers to her husband, one evening about six months after their marriage. “You remember my laughing, do you not, Frederick?”

“Yes, I remember it very well,” replied the husband, “and also how excited I was at it. You have not entirely forgotten that, either, I imagine, for you must confess that you gave me provocation enough to be very angry, Saade.”

“I acknowledge that I did; but I could not help it, certainly. You will be surprised to know the cause of my laughing, and you would have laughed, too, had you known that we were to be married, and that I knew it at the time. There you were on your knees, half dead with doubt and anxiety—looking as woe-begone as a criminal at the bar, when if you had been aware what an old fortune-teller told me a few days before, you might have saved yourself all that trouble to obtain my consent.”

“Yes, I might have saved myself all my misery and anxiety, if I had suspected that was what you were so pleased about,” returned the husband, vexed at the idea of having been himself the cause of all the anguish he had experienced at the time, while he had the power of turning the tables upon her; “but,” thought he, “better late than never, and I will have my revenge even now.”

He commenced in a grave tone,

“Why, my dear, I did not believe you were superstitious?”

“Nor am I,” she replied, “but the old woman told me my name when I first went into her room, without either of us mentioning a word, and then she told me other things that were true, and that I should be married within the year, and also described you so plainly, that I was forced to believe her.”

“And who do you think, my dear, told the old witch all this?”

“I don’t know, surely, but I suppose it was her familiar, as I heard them talking together.”

“That familiar, Saade, was neither more nor less than your present husband. What do you think of that, my dear? I overheard you talking about your intended visit to old Margaret, one day, and I immediately called upon her myself to give her timely notice of the honor. I bribed her pretty well, and requested that she would favor you with an especial good fortune, and even dictated the supreme happiness, which it was my particular wish you might realize. Was it any wonder then, that she should be able to describe your future husband so accurately, eh? Whose turn is it to laugh now? Am *I* not *the* fortune-teller, of a verity? say my sweet cozened?”

“Oh *you!!!* if I had but suspected!—how I should have hated you.”

“Never mind, my dear, its all past now; and she might have conjured a worse fortune for you, had I not prepared one for the occasion. You ought to be grateful, to be sure, for my consideration—don’t you think so?”

“On one condition, I will. That you do not breathe a word of it to Isabel.”

THE LADY'S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.